



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

### AGENDA ITEM

**DATE:** August 2, 2011

**12**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**SUBJECT:** CALIFORNIA'S FAILURE TO PRIORITIZE FIRE PROTECTION  
(DISTRICTS: ALL)

#### **SUMMARY:**

##### **Overview**

The recently passed Fiscal Year 2011-12 State Budget includes severe impacts to CAL FIRE's Fire Protection Program, with some impacts set to immediately take place. As it stands now, CAL FIRE will suffer a \$34 million budget cut for Fiscal Year 2011-12 due to the severe financial crisis that is plaguing the state. These cuts include 730 fewer seasonal firefighters, and reduced staffing by 25 percent on fire engines.

The southern region, including San Diego, will see a 50 percent reduction in winter preparedness engine staffing by CAL FIRE. The State is also considering eliminating five CAL FIRE bulldozers statewide. We do not support these proposed reductions, which will jeopardize public safety in San Diego County.

In addition to funding cuts, on July 7, 2011, Governor Brown signed ABX1 29 (Blumenfeld) which establishes a fire prevention fee, up to \$150 per structure within state responsibility areas. It is estimated that roughly \$10 million will be collected from the San Diego region, but it is unknown if \$10 million will be reinvested back into San Diego for fire prevention efforts. This fee, which is actually a tax, is a desperate measure by the California State Legislature and Governor to unfairly target rural property owners to make up for the State's inability to balance its budget and adequately fund fire protection.

Today's actions will oppose the cuts to CAL FIRE's budget and fight back against the implementation of the State's \$150 fire prevention fee.

##### **Recommendation(s)**

**SUPERVISOR SLATER-PRICE AND SUPERVISOR JACOB**

**SUBJECT: CALIFORNIA'S FAILURE TO PRIORITIZE FIRE PROTECTION  
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to draft a letter for signature by all members of the Board of Supervisors to members of the San Diego delegation in Sacramento and the Governor of California formally opposing the implementation of CAL FIRE's fire safety reductions, and requesting for the funds to be restored.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to take all necessary actions to oppose and/or challenge the \$150 fire prevention fee approved by the California State Legislature and signed into law by Governor Brown, including exploring legal options and asking the Board of Forestry to exempt property owners in San Diego County.
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to include in the County's Legislative Program opposition to legislative efforts to impose any additional fees or taxes on property and structures in the State Responsibility Areas (SRAs); and to support legislation to repeal ABX1 29.
4. Adopt a position in support of the proposed statewide referendum of ABX1 29. |

**Fiscal Impact**

There is no fiscal impact associated with these recommendations.

**Business Impact Statement**

N/A

**Advisory Board Statement**

N/A

**BACKGROUND:**

Each year CAL FIRE responds to more than 300,000 emergency incidents. The CAL FIRE San Diego Unit is responsible for protecting 1,237,201 State Responsibility Area (SRA) acres. Much of this acreage is filled with ready-to-burn dry brush, influenced by topography and severe weather conditions, such as the Santa Ana winds which create fire behavior conditions that present extreme challenges to fire suppression operations in the Unit year-round.

On June 30, 2011, Governor Brown signed into law the Fiscal Year 2011-12 State Budget. As a result there are severe impacts to CAL FIRE's Fire Protection Program, with some impacts set to immediately take place. As it stands now, CAL FIRE will suffer a \$34 million budget cut for Fiscal Year 2011-12 due to the severe financial crisis that is plaguing the state. These cuts include 730 fewer seasonal firefighters, and reduced staffing by 25 percent on fire engines.

The southern region, including San Diego, will see a 50 percent reduction in winter preparedness engine staffing by CAL FIRE. Typically CAL FIRE staffs 20 engines in the three Southern Units including San Bernardino (5), Riverside (5), and San Diego (10) during the winter period of November through March each year. The current budget calls for ten engines to be reduced.

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Additionally, the cuts to CAL FIRE's budget will eliminate the region's exclusive use of the DC-10 aerial firefighting aircraft for our peak fire season. This air tanker can drop 11,600 gallons of retardant on a fire, compared to 3,000 for the next largest air tanker. While the DC-10 can be utilized on a call-when-needed basis, there is a strong possibility it will be contracted elsewhere and be unavailable.

Coupled with the aviation asset cuts is the possible elimination of five firefighting bulldozers from the Southern California region. Bulldozers are absolutely critical to any firefighting effort because of their ability to cut fire breaks and remove potential fuel from a fire's path. The bulldozers conduct a lot of their work during the nighttime hours when aerial firefighting operations are grounded.

Losing personnel, firefighting aircraft and bulldozers will be a disastrous hit to our fire protection efforts in San Diego. Our fire season is year-round. We do not support these proposed reductions, which will jeopardize public safety.

In addition to funding cuts, on July 7, 2011, Governor Brown signed ABX1 29 (Blumenfield) which establishes a fire prevention fee, up to \$150 per structure within state responsibility areas. There are more than 65,000 parcels with dwelling units in San Diego County that could be susceptible to this fee. Based on the current estimates of the number of eligible structures it is estimated that roughly \$10 million will be collected from the San Diego region, but it is unknown if \$10 million will be reinvested back into San Diego for fire prevention efforts.

This fee, which is actually a tax, is a desperate measure by the California State Legislature and Governor to unfairly target rural property owners to make up for the State's inability to balance its budget and adequately fund fire protection. Public safety and wildland fire suppression should be a core responsibility of State government and the number one priority.

The County of San Diego has made a significant commitment to fire protection by providing \$15.5 million annually to augment rural fire protection in our most vulnerable areas. Approximately two-thirds of this money (\$10.2 million) is contracted with CAL FIRE. This has resulted in enhanced fire protection services at more than 50 stations throughout the entire unincorporated area of San Diego County. Based off this commitment, at the very least San Diego County should be exempt from the \$150 fee. This fee also amounts to double taxation because rural property owners are already paying for fire protection through their property taxes. In addition, many of them are paying additional taxes and benefit assessment fees to their local fire districts.

In less than a decade, this region has been engulfed by two major firestorms and battled more than 50 additional large wildfires. These fires have resulted in the destruction of thousands of homes, the devastation of nearly one-million acres and the tragic loss of innocent lives. This fee is victimizing many residents who lost their homes and would be the same as burning them twice.

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We are uncertain how the collection of the \$150 fee will impact local fire agencies. The law gives CAL FIRE until September 1, 2011, to adopt regulations for collection of the fire prevention fees. We know the law does not guarantee that the amount of funds collected locally will be utilized to provide services locally.

We have grave concerns about the cuts to CAL FIRE's budget compounded by a \$150 fire prevention fee that seems to do nothing to mitigate the loss of boots on the ground and equipment needed to adequately protect San Diego residents from another firestorm. Today's actions will oppose the cuts to CAL FIRE's budget and fight back against the implementation of the State's \$150 fire prevention fee.

**Linkage to the County of San Diego Strategic Plan**

N/A

Respectfully submitted,

PAM SLATER-PRICE  
Supervisor, Third District

DIANNE JACOB  
Supervisor, Second District

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

N/A

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**AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET**

**REQUIRES FOUR VOTES:**        Yes      No

**WRITTEN DISCLOSURE PER COUNTY CHARTER SECTION 1000.1 REQUIRED**  
   Yes      No

**PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOARD ACTIONS:**  
N/A

**BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:**  
N/A

**BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:**  
N/A

**MANDATORY COMPLIANCE:**  
N/A

**ORACLE AWARD NUMBER(S) AND CONTRACT AND/OR REQUISITION NUMBER(S):**  
N/A

**ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT:** District 3 and District 2, Board of Supervisors

**OTHER CONCURRENCE(S):**    N/A

**CONTACT PERSON(S):**

Mark Olson  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Name  
(619) 531-5533  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Fax  
MS A500  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mail Station  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail

Adam Wilson  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Name  
(619) 531-5522  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Fax  
MS A500  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mail Station  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail